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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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provisional agenda

QUESTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL PERSONS SUBJECTED TO ANY FORM OF DETENTION OR IMPRISONMENT

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE THIRD DECADE TO COMBAT RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Written statement submitted by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[31 January 1995]

Statement by the World Council of Churches Eminent Persons Team Which Conducted Hearings on Racism as a Violation of Human Rights in the United States

19 October 1994
Washington, D.C.

We have concluded our hearings, conducted over the past two weeks in various cities and localities of the United States, and have received written and oral testimony from members of various communities including Indigenous Peoples (Native Americans), African Americans, Latino and Asian people. We were also able to make on-site visits to see areas of complaint for ourselves.

Many witnesses emphasized various patterns of racism against people of colour:

- in housing, they live in appalling conditions and endure insecure and unstable tenure;

- in employment, they are discriminated against and relegated to the most menial jobs;

- in health, the delivery services are under funded and inefficiently run, resulting in higher rates of infant mortality, communicable diseases and cancer and decreased life expectancy;

- in education, the system is characterized by under funding, under achievement, alienation, and racist stereotyping;

- in the criminal justice system, the rate of imprisonment and the application of the death penalty are disproportionately higher among them;

- police brutality is common in their communities, especially against youth;

- immigration and refugee policy are biased against them.

Among the most angry and alienated groups to testify before us were the Indigenous Peoples, and African Americans, many of whom felt so strongly under threat that they genuinely believed they were the objects of genocidal policies.

Many witnesses also maintained there was a widespread practice of criminalizing political activity of groups perceived to be radical, and this led many of them to regard imprisoned activists as political prisoners or even prisoners of war.

Members of the Team were struck by environmental and waste disposal policies which seemingly singled out communities comprised largely of people of colour for toxic dumping, the siting of hazardous industries and other practices which posed a threat to the life and health of those communities.

Witnesses from the Puerto Rican, Indigenous Native American and Hawaiian peoples emphasized that their current status in the United States and their relationship with the United States Government stemmed from the colonial subjugation of their lands and ancestors. We were also made aware of their demand for sovereignty and self-determination.

We were told of the plight of the youth, disaffected and alienated, often without hope and with an overall lack of confidence in the capacity of political institutions to deliver meaningful change. The gains of the civil rights movement in terms of the vote had not led to sustainable economic emancipation for people of colour.

Witnesses said the mainstream of white society ignored and even denied the issue of racism, and that the mainstream media consistently under reported the issue.

We were mindful as a team commissioned by the WCC and NCC of the responsibilities of the whole church in combating racism. We found that in many areas, with some notable exceptions, concerns about racism were limited largely to the black churches. This constitutes a denial of the prophetic role of the church in combating racism as a sin.

On the basis of these considerations we conclude that:

1. There is widespread evidence of gross and consistent patterns of racism throughout the fabric of United States society;

2. Many of the acts of racism testified to in our hearings constitute apparent violations of fundamental human rights as set out in International Law.

We commend the appointment of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism and recommend that:

1. The United Nations through its agencies, especially the Commission on Human Rights, monitor the United States Government's performance in fulfilling its international obligations in this area;

2. There be full and thorough investigations of all these patterns of racism by the appropriate agencies of the United States Government, monitored by the media and the American people themselves;

3. The WCC and NCC member denominations should render all support and assistance to their judicatories, congregations and ecumenical bodies in education about and <u>opposition to</u> the human rights violations asserted here today.